DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 386 347 RC 020 239

AUTHOR Chacon, Antonio; Polo, Angel
TITLE From Literacy Activities to Entrepreneurship in Siete Pilas. Chapter 6.
PUB DATE 94
NOTE 13p.; In: Alpha 94: Literacy and Cultural Development Strategies in Rural Areas; see RC 020 235.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Education; *Community Development; Cooperatives; Educational Change; Education Work Relationship; *Entrepreneurship; Foreign Countries; Nontraditional Education; Program Descriptions; Rural Development; *Rural Education; *Vocational Education; *Work Experience Programs; Youth Programs
IDENTIFIERS *Spain

ABSTRACT

This chapter describes a community development project in Siete Pilas (Spain), a village whose economy is based primarily on small family farms and unskilled labor. The project grew out of the Sierra Education Program, which in 1980 sent adult-education teachers to five villages in the Sierra de Ronda region. The goal was to stimulate a socially and economically depressed area through literacy education and cultural development. The most successful of the projects was in Siete Pilas, where youths aged 15-20 received 10 hours of instruction a day aimed at developing a command of language, promoting a comprehensive understanding of history, developing logical and mathematical thinking through problem solving, and studying specific problems of the area. In addition, meetings were held with community members to discuss and plan action on problems affecting the Siete Pilas commune, including installing electricity and improving roads. The next phase of the project involved linking education and work and obtaining funds to implement a work training cooperative. Beekeeping was chosen because it is easy to learn, requires little investment, uses local resources, and is an old local tradition. In addition, a 6-month carpentry study program was implemented. To offset costs for purchasing equipment for the carpentry workshop and paying students minimum wage to encourage them to continue their work study, new programs were developed including work study programs in carpentry and cabinet-making and in bricklaying. (LP)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 386 347

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Thelma Barer-Stein

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

RC020239

Chapter 6
FROM LITERACY ACTIVITIES TO ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN SIETE PILAS

Antonio Chacón, Ángel Polo
Adult Education Centre
Siete Pilas, Spain

THE SIERRA DE RONDA REGION

The area in which this adult education project was conducted lies within the Sierra de Ronda region and has a population of approximately 8,000. It occupies a narrow strip between the Genal and Guadiaro valleys, sprinkled with small villages of 500 to 1,000 inhabitants and small scattered houses. Access to the area is difficult due to the mountainous terrain and the lack of adequate roads. The economy is based primarily on small family farms and providing unskilled labour to the Costa del Sol.

Over the past seven years, rural Spain (and especially Andalusia) has undergone radical changes as a result of EEC (European Economic Council) social and economic policies. The community development project which has been in operation in the area since 1980 has therefore been subject to constant change, to which we have tried to adapt our project by modifying it as required.

PHASE 1: TO STIMULATE THROUGH LITERACY & CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

The Siete Pilas rural community development project grew out of the Sierra Education Program sponsored by the Malaga General Council. In 1980, a group of young teachers were sent to five villages in the Sierra de Ronda region — Algatocin, Benalauria, Atajate, Salitre, Siete Pilas — to provide adult education. The basic idea was to try to stimulate a socially and economically very depressed

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ar through literacy and cultural development. The centres set up in the first four villages disappeared one after the other, but the Siete Pilas centre has grown steadily stronger, becoming a driving force for the development of an area of the Genal valley over the years.

The project coordinators (the authors) decided at the outset that they would have to live with the local people to understand their way of life and way of thinking. The goal was to create a school which would influence the behaviour of youths and adults and help them realize their full potential. The two teachers therefore rented a house in the Siete Pilas area (without electricity or running water, like all the other houses in the commune) and set about making direct contact with kids who had failed in the formal education system and whose relations with their parents were difficult. These first meetings revealed the following facts:

- people in the area learn by imitation (due in large part to their location in a small rural community);
- people had almost no capacity for abstraction (it was found only in a few set phrases and expressions);
- their written and oral expression was very under-developed (and compensated for by strong and complex emotionality);
- they viewed the unknown and anything new with complete distrust (they simply passed on unchanged the values inherited from their forefathers, never venturing outside the framework of preestablished ideas);
- their thinking was wholly practical.

The only way to persuade young people to attend the school at first was to make them realize that they might be able to earn a school certificate, which was of practical value. During this initial period, the teachers gradually fell in with the pace of local life, and they did so in the best possible way, through work. They worked the land without pay, helping the people plough, sow, reap, etc. Thus, when information meetings on the planned school were announced, parents attended with little resistance because their fear of the unknown (the teachers in this case) had gradually faded.

After the Siete Pilas Adult Education Centre began operating, the contacts made during these first meetings (which were held first in individual homes and then in the school with everyone invited) were put to use to launch an educational process aimed at meeting the needs of the local population:

- for young people seeking a school certificate, creating a participation-based school oriented towards use of intelligence rather than rote learning; a school aimed at rounded education and at ending the individualism typical of isolated regions;
- for adults, holding meetings on a continuous basis to discuss their problems and help them find solutions (e.g. lack of water and electricity, poor roads, random distribution of work days by the rural employment plan, etc.).

A hog barn measuring 6 m by 3 m was renovated for the preparatory classes for the school certificate. Youths aged 15 to 20 received 10 hours of instruction a day based primarily on the ideas of Lorenzo Milani's Barbiana school and Francisco Gutiérrez's "productive pedagogy". The method was founded on four elements:

- developing command of language (expression and comprehension) through detailed and analytic readings of texts of interest and anthologies; based on the individual ideas contributed by each student, a detailed and accurate synthesis is produced;
- promoting a comprehensive understanding of history capable of grasping the mechanisms governing social change, focusing in particular on the present day through analysis of texts and documents and through critical readings of the newspapers;
- developing logical and mathematical thinking by solving problems with practical applications;
- studying specific problems of the area to identify a specific issue, which is then given a wider application to other fields through objective and critical readings, with a view to drawing conclusions.

In the first two years, students reacted positively to this type of non-traditional education without tests, which was jointly and progressively developed by students and teacher. However, the school gradually came to appear inadequate:

- the school shifted from participatory education gradually towards "instrumental education" due to a lack of specific and valid reference points for the youths (such as a work activity);
- solidarity was conveyed through teaching — i.e. on the basis of theory — without creating concrete situations in which the spirit of solidarity could be applied.

On the adult education side, the meetings got over 30 people (out of a population of 250) involved in discussing problems affecting the Siete Pilas commune. They served to establish priorities (installing electricity, improving roads, information on the distribution of work days, etc.) and gave participants an opportunity to express their opinions. The fact that the teachers had worked side-by-side with the participants in the fields and were running a school to help their children obtain their school certificates directly contributed to the success of the meetings. But the meetings and the school for youths failed to mobilize participants. Once a week for over a year, rural problems were discussed and

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

potential solutions were put forward. But when it came to using pressure tactics to fight for rights, people seemed to back off.

PHASE 2: ADDING VOCATIONAL TRAINING

In Phase 2, an effort was made to add vocational training to general education, to make the school an instrument of integration. The mornings were now devoted to Phase 1 and the afternoons to Phase 2. This was an attempt to take two factors into account: the need to expand the educational experience through a vocational activity in order to broaden the youths' horizons in this respect and parents' expectations for more practical schooling, given that the youths were spending the whole day in class and had deserted the fields.

Parents were ready to make do without their children's labour as long as the school could offer alternative work. (It must not be forgotten that the youths had previously spent 10 hours a day working with their parents and were now spending 10 hours in school).

Given the total lack of means and unfamiliarity with the world of work, the school turned, as it had to in a rural area, to the only local agent who could exert any influence on vocational training at this level, the district agricultural engineer. Two inhabitants of the commune made tracts of land available and the group of youths, together with the teachers and the agricultural engineer, planted a row of saffron and a row of anise. (It seemed clear that an agricultural activity had to be chosen, given that the youths' work experience was limited to working in the fields. However, we felt that for this very reason the experiment was doomed to failure, for neither the parents nor the youths were prepared to give it their full support, the parents because they had not accepted their children leaving the family farm to work in other fields, and the youths because they wanted to do work unrelated to agriculture or livestock.)

As was to be expected, the experiment was a resounding failure as a work project, but it did enable the school to redirect its educational approach. The school's dynamic changed radically, because general education was now based on the work activities, allowing the youths to apply their knowledge outside school for the first time (they had to solve practical problems related to their work, thus promoting the development of logical/mathematical thinking). Solidarity education entered a second phase, for the requirement to divide the small production profit made solidarity among the youths a practical issue, not a theoretical matter. And finally, the educational process was based for the first time on social factors. During this period, the teachers tried to reverse the typical rural attitude to work, to replace "we want to do something, let's turn to the paternalism of the state" by "we are doing something, let's apply for grants to support our effort".

In the meetings with adults, the teachers tried to make progress and arrive at practical decisions to resolve the electricity issue. It was decided to form a

committee to pressure the Town Council. However, not one of the members turned up on the appointed day. Clearly, there was a gap between the theory of the meetings (where everyone participated) and the practical implementation of decisions (where no one was willing to accept responsibility).

The most negative aspect of this situation was that, in the end, it became irreversible. From this point on, the meetings started to become less frequent and attendance declined. After two years of meetings, the teachers conducting the project decided it was time to take practical action on the electricity front. This clear failure points to three conclusions:

1. lack of information and distrust are so deeply rooted among these people (due to their very hard lives) that it will take years to obtain positive results;
2. fear of the unknown leads them to value their small properties immensely, and they will not risklosing them for anything;
3. the teachers did not adopt the right approach.

PHASE 3: LINKING EDUCATION & WORK

By 1985, it seemed that the school had succeeded in inculcating some sense of solidarity and enterprise in the youths. It now seemed possible to link education more and more closely to work. At this stage the school was split into two groups to meet the youths' needs. One group came in the morning for a session focused on practical education. The afternoon was set aside for meetings of a group of students working on launching a cooperative.

The choice of work activity was based on the following factors:

a) Characteristics: easy to learn, small investment required, use of local resources.

b) Group composition: five youths who had obtained a school certificate at the Centre were made directly responsible for starting up the project and working on it; indirectly, all of the eight students attending the school worked on production twice a week on a volunteer basis.

c) Organization: the activity was organized around the two teachers. One essentially assumed responsibility for educating the youths and the other for coordinating all work-related activities intended to complement the education.

Beekeeping was chosen as the co-op's activity not only because it meets the above criteria but also and especially because it is an old local tradition in the Sierra de Ronda.

As money was needed to set up the co-op, the two teachers guaranteed a 1.5 million peseta loan to acquire equipment. The decision to provide the guarantee had a very positive effect on the youths (both the school population and the members of the future co-op); the teachers' willingness to assume responsibility generated enthusiasm about the school's new role. With the possibility of an integrated education meeting, the following description began to emerge:

- **Instrumental**: the creation of the cooperative prompted the members of the newly-created association to consolidate and enlarge their linguistic knowledge (in the afternoon, they read and analyzed the Andalusian Cooperatives Act

under the guidance of a teacher in order to understand it and be able to draft the cooperative's statutes and by-laws).

- **Based on Solidarity**: the youths attending the school only in the morning helped the association members in the afternoon on a volunteer basis in order to cut production costs and facilitate market access for the work team. The association members worked on the project knowing they would not receive any income in the short term.
- **Empowering**: At the future co-op's afternoon meetings with one of the teachers, it was clear that the people involved in the project were relying only on their own labour and resources.

The time had come to raise funds. This responsibility fell to the teacher who was serving as coordinator of work-related activities. All aid received by the group from that time forth was considered a complement — a necessary complement, to be sure, but a complement nevertheless. The money was not being raised in order to start up a work project with a group of youths, in which case it would have been state paternalism and the aid received would not have been appreciated; grants were rather being sought to consolidate a project which the youths had themselves launched with the teachers.

A Cordoba foundation funded the acquisition of 100 complete beehives, and a continuing education association in Madrid provided a general purpose machine with which the youths could start to manufacture their first hives for sale. At this time, one of the teachers set about organizing six-month work-study programs in carpentry for the students. This project was approved and the students travelled to Ronda daily to improve their skills. To make up for their absence, the remaining students at the school increased their participation in the project and began working every afternoon on a volunteer basis. This dynamic meant a radical change in the educational process, which shifted towards teaching the principles of cooperative management. From this point on, the work project guided the activities of the school.

Meanwhile, the meetings and work with adults ended in 1986. There were two reasons for this relative failure. As the teachers were increasingly involved in their work with the youths, they found it very difficult to attend meetings regularly; and it is possible that the orientation of the meetings did not meet the participants' expectations.

The situation deteriorated at the end of the year, when the members of the work project and the teachers barricaded themselves inside the Town Hall to draw the attention of municipal officials to the need for premises for their activities. Most of the inhabitants of the village were against this initiative by the students and the participants in the meetings refused to support them. This lack of commitment on the part of the adults led the teachers to focus all their efforts on the school's new education/production dynamic, in the hope that they would eventually have an effect on they older members of the community through the youths.

PHASE 4: COMBINING PRODUCTION & EDUCATION

From the outset, this phase had to confront a specific problematic which continues to define the situation to this day — how to combine production and education.

On the one hand, the occupational qualifications of the youths had to be enhanced and the new carpentry workshop for making the beehives had to be better equipped; on the other hand, the youths had to be given a minimum salary to encourage them to continue, for they were beginning to grow discouraged after two years of work. The solution was not easy to find; if we decided to boost production, it could only be at the expense of the group's vocational education, which in the long term would weaken its competitiveness and sap its cooperative spirit; if we decided to emphasize the work-study programs, the number of hours allocated to production would have to be reduced and with it the chances of obtaining a decent salary. This problem was aggravated by a crash in the prices of apiculture-related products due to a disease which struck over 50% of honey bees. The market collapsed and the work team had to consider a hasty conversion. The youths knew how to use carpentry equipment, having manufactured beehives, and they had a small but adequate infrastructure with which they could try to gradually penetrate the professional woodworking market.

The time had therefore come to consider a project to help finance the new work activity, taking into consideration three priority needs:

- developing specialized vocational skills for the youths, by means of an 800-hour work-study program in carpentry/cabinet-making;
- organizing a work-study program in bricklaying to met the need for new buildings;
- adapting the school program to this new activity.

Aid was received in 1987; a European Social Fund-financed work-study program provided enough support to allow gradual consolidation of the work project. The core carpentry workshop team (which already had eight members) combined training in the trade (mornings) with production (afternoons); meanwhile, financing was obtained for materials over a period of nearly seven months, thus providing the first regular revenues, as costs were subsidized. The group met weekly with a teacher in order to complement its education by performing mathematical calculations to set selling prices, and by studying the operation of cooperatives, the last step in order to prepare the group's constitution.

A bricklaying work team was formed at the same time, also as a European Social Fund-financed work-study program. Preliminary meetings were held among all the participants in the project and the new group, and a joint decision was made to build a shed to house the future cooperative. During this time, the

group of youths attending the school continued the program established at the end of Phase 2: instrumental education in the morning tailored to the work to be done, and volunteer work in the afternoon, either in the carpentry workshop or the bricklaying workshop.

PHASE 5: INCREASING SALES

The progressive increase in sales and the need to handle any subsidies which might be received in an appropriate manner raised two important questions: legally registering the cooperative (initially under the trusteeship of one of the teachers) in order to secure legal status for the work activity; and creating an association with representation from all the groups involved in the experiment for the purpose of operating the projects and managing subsidies.

The time had come to find resources to consolidate the work team's participation in the work force. The Siete Pilas Adult Education Centre began working to forge relationships with local social actors. Together, the participants in the experiment, led by the teachers, analyzed the upheaval under way in rural Spain and the myriad of subsidies and programs developed by the EEC and the Spanish government to help rural citizens adapt. Each group involved in the project met once a week with one of the teachers to examine these issues in detail.

The APISUR work cooperative was legally founded with five members in late 1987. The group split in two at this time: the members of the co-op now spent all their time on structural carpentry while the others — a group of eight youths plus the students attending the school — continued the work-study program. They had a Trades Centre (during the 1988-89 period, courtesy of Cáritas Española) where they could learn a another skill of a different type than the co-op, so as not to saturate the structural carpentry market. This new group devoted itself primarily to manufacturing rustic furniture. One of the teachers taught a course on drafting specifications and estimates and cooperative management two afternoons per week. The Trades Centre made it possible to create a bricklaying module, which continued to work on the facilities needed for the Adult Education Centre's work-study activities. After the Trades Centre, two sheds measuring 350 m^2 were built to house the two carpentry work teams.

It became clear that the project had shifted from a school offering instrumental education to a centre providing mainly work-study programs and instruction in cooperative management. At the same time as the Trades Centre was being set up, and following a number of meetings with all the participants in the experiment, the decision was made to set up a non-profit organization, the Guadiro Socioeconomic Initiatives Centre (CISE). This organization was created in order to settle the problem of the ownership of the immovable property built at the initiative of the Adult Education Centre. The purpose of the Association is to manage projects as they are set up and to advise the youths in

all matters, especially the creation of viable work projects.

During the 1988-89 period, a group of nine youths continued to attend the school in the morning; in the afternoon, the entire group went to the furniture workshop. Equipment had to be acquired for this new group. One of the teachers and the district agricultural engineer landed a 2,500,000 peseta order for beehives. The work team built the bodies and the students from the school assembled the frames in the afternoon. With funding from the Trades Centre for the materials and volunteer labour by the students in the school, a large profit was realized which was allocated to the purchase of basic furniture manufacturing equipment.

The APISUR co-op also consolidated its position during this period, due essentially to the addition of two 30-year-old carpenters to the group, who gave the co-op a professionalism which had previously been lacking. It was at this point that one of the most important steps in the entire experiment was decided upon: each self-sufficient work team was required to contribute 5% of its sales to a solidarity fund for youths in the region (solidarity through production). APISUR made its first contribution in January 1990 and the furniture manufacturing work team did so in 1991.

PHASE 6: FROM HERE TO THE FUTURE

This phase extends into the present. The current objectives are to:

- consolidate the work teams and hence the youths' participation in the work force;
- develop solidarity in the work environment;
- adapt theoretical instruction to the work situation (the school as it had been conceived disappeared);
- set up new mechanisms to create a number of CISE;
- strengthen links with local social agents.

The following two examples bear witness to these orientations:

1. In late 1989, a project to manufacture Moresque tiles and clay tiles was set up. This project was no longer launched from the same starting point as the first project but instead was built on specific components based on the Centre's past experience. This included the 5% contribution to the solidarity fund; support from the CISE for accounting, taxes, work and the market, rather than from one of the teachers acting as liaison agent; and financing from the European Social Fund for the tile kiln, managed through the CISE.
2. During this phase, the Centre set about contacting local social agents through CISE. In 1990, the "Valle del Guadiaro" workshop/school project was conceived. It involved seven villages in the region and was sponsored in conjunction with the seven town councils. In 1991, the LEADER project (a community initiative co-ordinated by CISE) was launched in the Sierra de Ronda region.

This overture to the outside world brought the project into contact with local socioeconomic realities and EEC economic directives. In accordance with local needs and EEC orientations, all economic activity generated by the project was

clearly oriented towards manufacturing a number of high-quality, closely interrelated handicraft products, so that a purchaser of one of our products is a potential customer for all the others. This approach facilitates sales by concentrating efforts on a single market rather than three different ones, thereby realizing savings on marketing and advertising. For example, a person who is having a country-house built can be offered hardwood structural carpentry hand-finished in virgin wax, as well as unique old pine rustic furniture decorated with encrustations or hand-carved designs and hand-made clay tiles with original designs.

The training is adapted to the work activities and is based on two ideas:

1. ongoing practical education:
   - one hour per day of instrumental education (design specifications and calculation of estimates);
   - attending exhibitions either as exhibitors or as visitors;
   - weekly meetings for each group with the teachers to monitor activities, examine new initiatives, provide information on EEC socioeconomic directives for rural regions;
   - follow-up on work-study programs organized by the Andalusian Federation of Cooperatives (currently, a basic program in business management);
   - joint initiatives to create projects that qualify for subsidies;
2. ongoing education in solidarity:
   - production co-ops contribute 5% of sales to support other work projects for young people;
   - members of marginal social groups are included on work teams (e.g. a mentally handicapped person in the Tiles work team, an ex-addict in the Structural Carpentry co-op);
   - a housing co-op has been created which is now building nine homes for the members of the three work teams;
   - establishment of an information centre on alternative community service. Of approximately 30 youths who have taken part in the experiment, eight declared themselves to be conscientious objectors, which is consistent with the philosophy of Milani schools, which aim to develop critical thinking and a participatory spirit capable of involving all people at all levels in strengthening the local social fabric.

REFLECTIONS

The community-based experiment conducted in Siete Pilas by the Adult Education Centre initially aimed to promote cultural development by providing literacy education and also by stimulating the social fabric through the development of an educational process embracing as many aspects as possible and based in all cases on instrumental education. Twelve years later, the goal remains the same — to stimulate the social fabric — but the methods and bases have changed, and elements which were not considered essential at the outset have been added.

The educational process, which initially focused on cultural development, is now focused on work. Today, the type of theoretical training given is determined by the practical training, and the objectives have been reversed. Initially, all the activities considered were subordinated to instrumental education required to obtain a school certificate. Today, the school's orientation is based on the work activities, and youths must adapt to the work, which is chosen on the basis of its viability and EEC socioeconomic directives for rural regions.

The original school set up has disappeared because it was unable to adapt to a rapidly changing rural environment. Imparting knowledge for a school certificate has been relegated to a secondary position. Instead, youths are learning a set of practical skills directly related to the work they will do, while participating in solidarity education. Social commitment has changed from a theoretical goal to a practical reality.

The work with adults (aged 40 and over) has gradually been abandoned. The negative results of that experiment and the emphasis in the school on work made continuity in the meetings with adults impossible. Communication with the adults did improve to some extent, but only because of the successes with the work teams for youths. It may be up to the youths to continue, as far as they are able, the work the teachers had begun in the meetings with parents.

The project's shortcomings are that the teaching methodology and evaluation methods used in this "training through work" lack systematization, and basic education has been neglected. Today, the project initiators can be seen as promoters of work teams for youths, advisors on cooperatives, developers of projects at the regional level, teachers responsible for work-study programs in cooperative management, seekers of subsidies, specialists in socioeconomic realities, etc. However, their essential role is unchanged.

Note & Reference

1. Corzo, José Luis and Julio Lancho, "Adult Education: Literacy for the Masses" in Jean-Paul Hautecoeur, ed., *ALPHA 92* (Hamburg: Unesco Institute for Education, 1992).